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The use of the scientific method is offered as the most productive way of promoting better practice in intergroup relations education. The trial and error method can be used, but the scientific "why" should be raised to determine the reason for a specific technique's success.

The first step toward achieving a scientific approach to the programing and evaluating of intergroup relations education is to convert difficulties into problems. For example, rather than to ask "How can we reduce prejudice among students?", the question should be changed to "Are movies favorable to racial minorities effectivein reducing race prejudice?". Such a research ap roach permits the step-by-step evaluation of techniques used to accomplish long-range goals.

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ON RESEARCH AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

MARK LEFTON

The use of scientific method is offered as the most productive way of promoting better practice in intergroup-relations education. The author is associate professor of sociology at Western Reserve University.

THERE is a growing awareness among educators and the educated that the classroom is perhaps the most feasible as well as the most strategic place to begin the training necessary for better intergroup relations. The logic of this position has been simply though eloquently put: "The classroom of the public school is the place, the only one for most, in which a great variety of children have the chance to meet, to work and play together, to learn that differences of race, religion, nationality, money and even mental ability are not valid reasons for rejection."[1] It is equally logical, however, to argue that potentialities, no matter how potent or promising, do not automatically imply realization; indeed, what at first appears to be positive and desirable may, if left to chance, turn out to be unwanted as well as unforeseen. If we are to take advantage of the opportunities so obviously available in the classrooms across our land, we must be prepared to lend a helping hand to a process we can ill afford to take for granted or trust to hope alone.

This paper is concerned, therefore, with the way intergroup-relations education ought to be developed in the elementary- and secondary-school setting. It takes as its point of departure the position that intergroup education, however defined, is destined to fail unless those who are most intimately involved in this matter recognize the need for and are willing to subject action to critical analysis and evaluation. Only in this way can they be apprised of the efficacy of specific methods and techniques. We suggest,

[1] North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. *Teacher Education for Human Relations in the Classroom*, p. 3.

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however, that evaluation is not a mere appendage to or an exercise independent from action per se. It must be planned for in much the same way as concrete programs or projects are planned. In fact, the programing and evaluating of intergroup-relations projects are inseparable dimensions of the same process. It is our contention that in order to achieve this goal, human-relations educationalists must not only appreciate the methods of science but must also assume much of the responsibility for seeing that the prerequisites for conducting reliable research in this field are fulfilled.

I am aware of the many attempts to persuade those who are directly involved in educational matters of the need for more and better research. I am equally aware, however, of the uphill battle that these efforts entail. It is well known that a tradition of research does not exist in education as it does, for example, in medicine or engineering, where both professionals and consumers commonly agree that research and progress are virtually identical. It is no surprise, therefore, to find large discrepancies between statements of aims and objectives and statements regarding the most appropriate ways of achieving them. In other words, while it is relatively easy to posit general intentions, it is quite another matter to plan skillfully and intelligently so that the steps to be taken toward stated goals are as meaningful as the goals themselves. There is no absence of research know-how; rather the difficulty lies with making what is known about research available to those who are responsible for the planning of general and special programs. But it is even more important, perhaps, to convince educationalists that science and practice are not incompatible, as is sometimes believed, and that their union is, in fact, indispensable if we sincerely desire to get on with the monumental tasks which lie ahead. But it is readily apparent that in order to achieve this union, a great deal of preliminary work must be done. One of the very first needs confronting those who seek to promote such ideas is to make sure that potential recipients are aware of what it is they are to receive. It is the purpose of this paper to indicate a number of strategic concerns relevant to this immediate objective. While it is difficult to argue that these concerns are unique or even the most important of those which could have been selected, I believe that their restatement may begin a welding process that has been too long merely a hope.

THE essential difference between the professional practitioner and the scientist is best understood when each responds to the question, "What is the problem?" To the practitioner, the problem is generally a situation, condition, or event which is regarded as requir-

ing resolution through action. The major issue for the practitioner is the "how" issue; the physician, for example, is concerned with *how* best to treat an illness; the engineer with *how* to span a river or build a tunnel; the intergroup-relations specialist with *how* to reduce prejudice, minimize discrimination, or modify stereotypes. In short, the problem for these experts is a concrete difficulty for which action per se is the mode of resolution.

The scientist, on the other hand, is less interested in specific action than in establishing the reasons *why* a given activity may or may not be an appropriate response to a particular situation. Thus, for the scientist a problem is a *question* relevant to a condition which requires solution *before* action may be taken. That is to say, the scientist attempts to formulate his problem in such a way that action is utilized principally as a test for his solution rather than solely as a remedy for a particular difficulty. The practitioner perceives difficulties and attempts to resolve them directly through active intervention; the scientist, on the other hand, conceptualizes difficulties as problems to be stated and solved prior to active efforts at resolution. Ideally, the practitioner and the scientist complement each other. When we feel that action is required to ameliorate or alter an undesirable condition, we want to know what action to take that will get the job done. In other words, we want to apply those techniques that have been tested and proved to be reliable for our intended objective. In much the same way as the physician knows how to treat disease and the engineer knows how to build his bridge, the intergroup-relations educationalist wants to know how to cope with his special difficulties.

At this point, however, there emerges a fundamental dilemma that sharply distinguishes the physician and the engineer from the human-relations practitioner. Whereas the former utilize the knowledge gained by long established sciences—e.g., biology, chemistry, and physics—the latter has little choice but to turn to those sciences still in their formative stages of development and not as yet capable of offering many valid laws or generalizations—namely, psychology and sociology. I do not mean to imply that these sciences are not capable of eventually fulfilling their promises, nor are they at present completely without success in having achieved some progress toward a verified and systematic body of knowledge. Nevertheless, given the complexities of human behavior and the fact that these disciplines are extremely young when compared to the physical sciences, any attempt to compare them in terms of demonstrable accomplishments is decidedly premature. But it is precisely because of the tentativeness of our knowledge regarding

human relations that the practitioner must become more acutely aware of his potential contribution toward those very objectives in which he himself has a critical interest. The realization of this potential, however, lies in the educationalist's ability to convert the very need to resolve demonstrable difficulties into opportunities that will permit an increase in our understanding of them as well as of the methods by which we may be able to cope with them.

In the area of intergroup relations, there are numerous occasions that demand active intervention. But often we are not certain that the action taken is appropriate to the situation at hand; trial and error is a technique familiar to all of us. At the same time, however, we also know that to try and to err can be costly as well as successful and that the price we must sometimes pay for ultimate success may not be worth the effort made to achieve it. But most disheartening is the recognition that, despite a tremendous output in terms of time and energy, we may be no better off than we were at the very start. Trial and error, while potentially capable of success, is no guarantee that we may achieve in the same way every time, nor does it assure us that we know *why* a specific technique "worked." For these reasons then, human-relations practitioners must structure their efforts at resolution in such a way as to minimize the utilization of trial and error procedures and to maximize opportunities for purposive and successful ameliorative programs.

THE first step toward achieving a scientific approach to the programing and evaluating of intergroup-relations education is to convert difficulties into problems. An effort must be made to transform vague and unanswerable questions into ones that are clear and answerable. Few would deny, for example, the significance of such questions as "How can we reduce prejudice among students?" or "How may the school setting be utilized to direct the development of interpersonal and intergroup attitudes toward higher levels of acceptance and understanding?" However, given the present state of our knowledge with respect to attitude formation and change and the lack of clear definition of such phrases as "higher levels of acceptance and understanding," such "questions" suggest a point of view rather than statements for which we have concrete answers. Even more to the point, questions of this kind rarely indicate with any degree of precision the direction to take or the method that might be used in order to find answers.

The search for answers makes sense only when we have answerable questions to guide us. When we change the question, "How

can we reduce prejudice among students?" to "Are movies favorable to racial minorities effective in reducing race prejudice?" we have taken an important step toward introducing science into the practice of intergroup-relations education.

Let us be clear about the meaning and implications of the difference between these two questions. They differ essentially in terms of the kinds of answers each implies. The former appears to direct attention to an answer that is complete in the sense that it implies an "ultimate" conclusion, whereas the latter is the kind of question that is far more immediate in nature and directs us to partial solution of a more general dilemma. Moreover, the clear, precise question does not gainsay action; it serves to implicate action so that it can function both as an attempted resolution of a difficulty and as a possible answer to a specific query. It is the second of these functions that is of special interest: what is meant by the suggestion that action may be viewed as an answer to a question?

Earlier it was noted that the scientist seeks to solve a problem before action is taken. In general this means that he formulates his problem in such a way that action is implicated as an intricate aspect of it and not merely as a chance occurrence. The scientist, therefore, *hypothesizes* that the action at issue will have a particular effect or consequence relevant to the designated difficulty—e.g., "All other things being equal, students should be less prejudiced after seeing a movie favorable to racial minorities than they were before." It should be clear that this hypothesis does not claim that observing movies is the only method of reducing prejudice nor that it is even a good one. That is not the problem; we are interested in knowing whether seeing such movies is one method that has definite results. In other words, we attempt to structure an answer in terms of a specified relationship between the events in which we are interested. It is a statement that serves to narrow our focus so that instead of merely looking *at* things, we are forced to look *for* something. It is the hypothesis that both defines and directs the search for the relevant facts and precludes the gathering of data purely in the hope that eventually they will serve some purpose as yet unspecified.

The hypothesis is, therefore, more than a simple statement of relationship. It is at the same time an indicator of the way in which its efficacy as an answer is to be assessed. This means that we would have to examine the effects of a specific movie on a given student population under specified conditions. We would need to know, for example, just how prejudiced a given population was before seeing the movie and just how much change occurred as

a result of seeing it. We would need to specify the circumstances under which the movie was shown, the time and place of the showing, the size and composition of the audience, and so on. In short, a hypothesis is an answer, but it is one that requires careful testing—i.e., the gathering of the relevant facts—before we may accept or reject it. It is, therefore, always tentative until exposed to empirical reality, but under conditions appropriate to it. A hypothesis is regarded as verified if it is supported by the data that are accumulated to test it. If the findings are contrary to our expectations, the hypothesis is rejected. Verification of a hypothesis brings a scientific inquiry to a successful conclusion. It means we have documented, at least tentatively, a definite proposition relating the phenomenon under investigation to certain other events and conditions. A verified hypothesis should improve our ability to predict or control the phenomenon in question. For example, if our hypothesis relating prejudice and movies were verified, we should be able to predict and perhaps to control racial prejudice among students by showing movies concerning race problems.

IT SHOULD be apparent by this time that in calling for a scientific approach to the development of intergroup-relations education we offer neither a substitute for long-range goals nor a procedure antagonistic to them. Science is in fact the only method we know which permits the step-by-step evaluation of the techniques used in order to reach those goals. By the same token, to be scientific in one's attitude toward action does not deny the merits of action; to research the efficacy of action is to attempt to better utilize such procedures in the future. But to be scientific about one's difficulties is not easy, nor should it be. It requires care and, above all, patience and a willingness to ask less profound but answerable questions.

It is obvious that the particular concerns selected for discussion here are the barest beginnings in the effort to establish a frame of reference by which to develop appropriate intergroup programs. We hope, however, that these are strategic ones in that they serve to alter misunderstandings between the ways and means of the practitioner vis-à-vis the scientist. And for those whose special concern is with attitudes and their consequences for particular kinds of behavior, the lesson intended is as logical as it is necessary. It is logical in that our effort has been directed toward those whose role in the training for better intergroup relations is both unique and of profound importance. It is necessary because we can no longer afford the luxury of wasting our opportunities.